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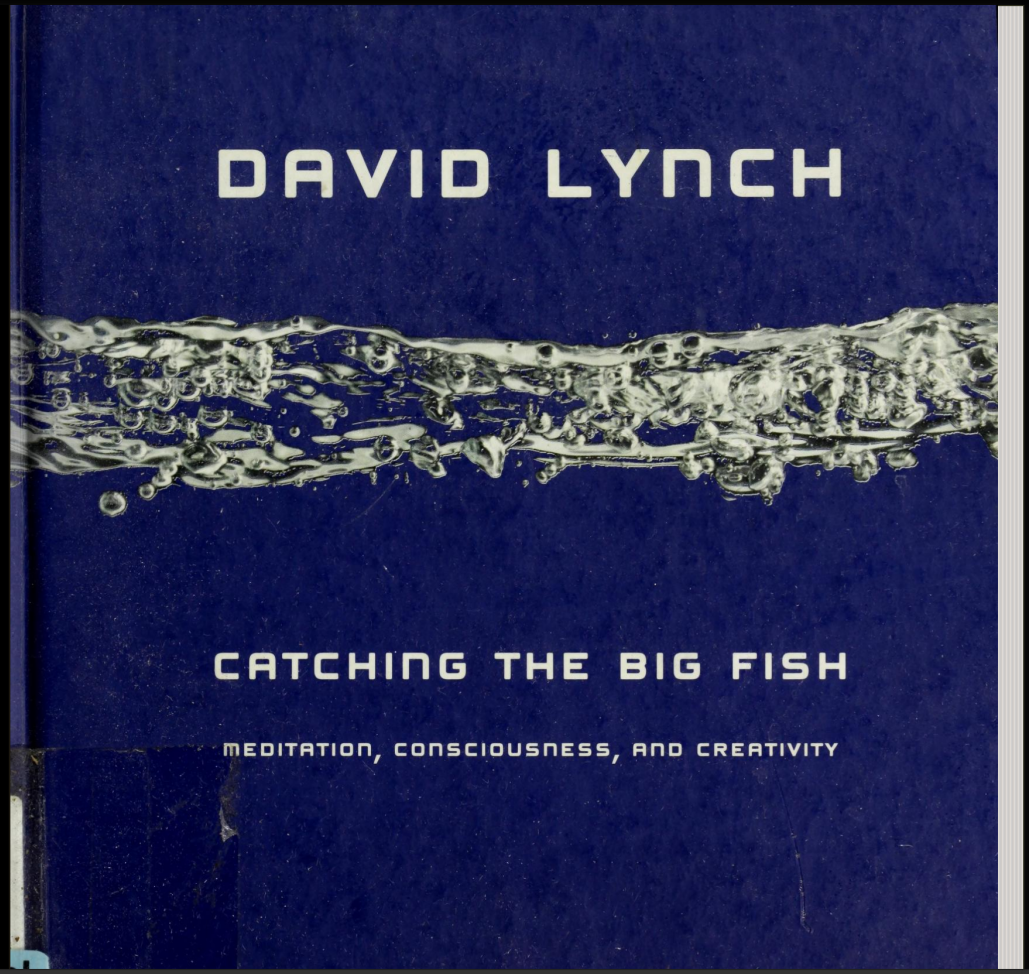

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To His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas are like fish.

If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you've got to go deeper.

Down deep, the fish are more powerful and more pure. They're huge and abstract. And they're very beautiful.

I look for a certain kind of fish that is important to me, one that can translate to cinema. But there are all kinds of fish swimming down there. There are fish for business, fish for sports. There are fish for everything.

Everything, anything that is a thing, comes up from the deepest level. Modern physics calls that level the Unified Field. The more your consciousness—your awareness—is expanded, the deeper you go toward this source, and the bigger the fish you can catch.

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My thirty-three-year practice of the Transcendental Meditation program has been central to my work in film and painting and to all areas of my life. For me it has been the way to dive deeper in search of the big fish. In this book, I want to share some of those experiences with you.

THE FIRST DIVE

He whose happiness is within, whose contentment is within,
whose light is all within, that yogi, being one
with Brahman, attains eternal freedom in divine consciousness.

BHAGAVAD-GITA

When I first heard about meditation, I had zero interest in it. I wasn't even curious. It sounded like a waste of time.

What got me interested, though, was the phrase "true happiness lies within." At first I thought it sounded kind of mean, because it doesn't tell you where the "within" is, or how to get there. But still it had a ring of truth. And I began to think that maybe meditation was a way to go within.

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I looked into meditation, asked some questions, and started contemplating different forms. At that moment, my sister called and said she had been doing Transcendental Meditation for six months. There was something in her voice. A change. A quality of happiness. And I thought, *That's what I want.*

So in July 1973 I went to the TM center in Los Angeles and met an instructor, and I liked her. She looked like Doris Day. And she taught me this technique. She gave me a mantra, which is a sound-vibration-thought. You don't meditate on the meaning of it, but it's a very specific sound-vibration-thought.

She took me into a little room to have my first meditation. I sat down, closed my eyes, started this mantra, and it was as if I were in an elevator and the cable had been cut. Boom! I fell into bliss—pure bliss. And I was just *in* there. Then the teacher said, "It's time to come out; it's been twenty minutes." And I said, "IT'S ALREADY BEEN TWENTY MINUTES?!" And she said, "Shhhh!" because other people were meditating. It seemed so familiar, but also so new and powerful. After that, I said the word "unique" should be reserved for this experience.

It takes you to an ocean of pure consciousness, pure knowingness. But it's familiar; it's *you*. And right away a sense of happiness emerges—not a goofball happiness, but a thick beauty.

I have never missed a meditation in thirty-three years. I meditate once in the morning and again in the afternoon, for about twenty minutes each time. Then I go about the business of my day. And I find that the joy of doing increases. Intuition increases. The pleasure of life grows. And negativity recedes.

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SUFFOCATING RUBBER CLOWN SUIT

It would be easier to roll up the entire sky into
a small cloth than it would be to obtain true happiness
without knowing the Self.

UPANISHADS

When I started meditating, I was filled with anxieties and fears. I felt a sense of depression and anger.

I often took out this anger on my first wife. After I had been meditating for about two weeks, she came to me and said, "What's going on?" I was quiet for a moment. But finally I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "This anger, where did it go?" And I hadn't even realized that it had lifted.

I call that depression and anger the Suffocating Rubber Clown Suit of Negativity. It's *suffocating,* and that rubber *stinks.* But once you start meditating and diving within,

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the clown suit starts to dissolve. You finally realize how putrid was the stink when it starts to go. Then, when it dissolves, you have freedom.

Anger and depression and sorrow are beautiful things in a story, but they're like poison to the filmmaker or artist. They're like a vise grip on creativity. If you're in that grip, you can hardly get out of bed, much less experience the flow of creativity and ideas. You must have clarity to create. You have to be able to catch ideas.

STARTING OUT

I started out just as a regular person, growing up in the Northwest. My father was a research scientist for the Department of Agriculture, studying trees. So I was in the woods a lot. And the woods for a child are magical. I lived in what people call small towns. My world was what would be considered about a city block, maybe two blocks. Everything occurred in that space. All the dreaming, all my friends existed in that small world. But to me it seemed so huge and magical. There was plenty of time available to dream and be with friends.

I liked to paint and I liked to draw. And I often thought, wrongly, that when you got to be an adult, you stopped painting and drawing and did something more serious. In the ninth grade, my family moved to Alexandria, Virginia. On the front lawn of my girlfriend's house one night, I met a guy named Toby Keeler. As we were talking, he said his father was a painter. I thought maybe he might have been

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a house painter, but further talking got me around to the fact that he was a fine artist.

This conversation changed my life. I had been somewhat interested in science, but I suddenly knew that I wanted to be a painter. And I wanted to live the art life.

THE ART LIFE

In high school, I read Robert Henri's book *The Art Spirit,* which prompted the idea of the art life. For me, living the art life meant a dedication to painting—a complete dedication to it, making everything else secondary.

That, I thought, is the only way you're going to get in deep and discover things. So anything that distracts from that path of discovery is not part of the art life, in that way of thinking. Really, the art life means a freedom. And it seems, I think, a hair selfish. But it doesn't have to be selfish; it just means that you need time.

Bushnell Keeler, the father of my friend Toby, always had this expression: "If you want to get one hour of good painting in, you have to have four hours of uninterrupted time."

And that's basically true. You don't just start painting. You have to sit for a while and get some kind of mental idea in order to go and make the right moves. And you

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need a whole bunch of materials at the ready. For example, you need to build framework stretchers for the canvas. It can take a long time just to prepare something to paint on. And then you go to work. The idea just needs to be enough to get you started, because, for me, whatever follows is a process of action and reaction. It's always a process of building and then destroying. And then, out of this destruction, discovering a thing and building on it. Nature plays a huge part in it. Putting difficult materials together—like baking something in sunlight, or using one material that fights another material—causes its own organic reaction. Then it's a matter of sitting back and studying it and studying it and studying it; and suddenly, you find you're leaping up out of your chair and going in and doing the next thing. That's action and reaction.

But if you know that you've got to be somewhere in half an hour, there's no way you can achieve that. So the art life means a freedom to have time for the good things to happen. There's not always a lot of time for other things.

A GARDEN AT NIGHT

So I was a painter. I painted and I went to art school. I had no interest in film. I would go to a film sometimes, but I really just wanted to paint.

One day I was sitting in a big studio room at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The room was divided into little cubicles. I was in my cubicle; it was about three o'clock in the afternoon. And I had a painting going, which was of a garden at night. It had a lot of black, with green plants emerging out of the darkness. All of a sudden, these plants started to move, and I heard a wind. I wasn't taking drugs! I thought, *Oh, how fantastic this is!* And I began to wonder if film could be a way to make paintings move.

At the end of each year, there was an experimental painting and sculpture contest. The year before, I had built something for the contest, and this time I thought: *I'm going to do a moving painting.* I built a sculptured screen—six feet by eight feet—and pro-

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jected a pretty crudely animated stop-motion film on it. It was called *Six Men Getting Sick*. I thought that was going to be the extent of my film career, because this thing actually cost a fortune to make—two hundred dollars. *I simply can't afford to go down this road,* I thought. But an older student saw the project and commissioned me to build one for his home. And that was what started the ball rolling. After that, I just kept getting green lights. Then little by little—or rather leap by leap—I fell in love with this medium.

CURTAINS UP

Know that all of Nature is but a magic theater,
that the great Mother is the master magician,
and that this whole world is peopled by her many parts.

UPANISHADS

It's so magical—I don't know why—to go into a theater and have the lights go down. It's very quiet, and then the curtains start to open. Maybe they're red. And you go into a world.

It's beautiful when it's a shared experience. It's still beautiful when you're at home and your theater is in front of you, though it's not quite as good. It's best on a big screen. That's the way to go into a world.

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CINEMA

Cinema is a language. It can say things—big, abstract things. And I love that about it.

I'm not always good with words. Some people are poets and have a beautiful way of saying things with words. But cinema is its own language. And with it you can say so many things, because you've got time and sequences. You've got dialogue. You've got music. You've got sound effects. You have so many tools. And so you can express a feeling and a thought that can't be conveyed any other way. It's a magical medium.

For me, it's so beautiful to think about these pictures and sounds flowing together in time and in sequence, making something that can be done only through cinema. It's not just words or music—it's a whole range of elements coming together and making something that didn't exist before. It's telling stories. It's devising a world, an experience, that people cannot have unless they see that film.

When I catch an idea for a film, I fall in love with the way cinema can express it. I like a story that holds abstractions, and that's what cinema can do.

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INTERPRETATION

A film should stand on its own. It's absurd if a filmmaker needs to say what a film means in words. The world in the film is a created one, and people sometimes love going into that world. For them that world is real. And if people find out certain things about how something was done, or how this means this or that means that, the next time they see the film, these things enter into the experience. And then the film becomes different. I think it's so precious and important to maintain that world and not say certain things that could break the experience.

You don't need anything outside of the work. There have been a lot of great books written, and the authors are long since dead, and you can't dig them up. But you've got that book, and a book can make you dream and make you think about things.

People sometimes say they have trouble understanding a film, but I think they understand much more than they realize. Because we're all blessed with intuition—we really have the gift of intuiting things.

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Someone might say, I don't understand music; but most people experience music emotionally and would agree that music is an abstraction. You don't need to put music into words right away—you just listen.

Cinema is a lot like music. It can be very abstract, but people have a yearning to make intellectual sense of it, to put it right into words. And when they can't do that, it feels frustrating. But they can come up with an explanation from within, if they just allow it. If they started talking to their friends, soon they would see things—what something is and what something isn't. And they might agree with their friends or argue with their friends—but how could they agree or argue if they don't already know? The interesting thing is, they really do know more than they think. And by voicing what they know, it becomes clearer. And when they see something, they could try to clarify that a little more and, again, go back and forth with a friend. And they would come to some conclusion. And that would be valid.

THE CIRCLE

I like the saying: "The world is as you are." And I think films are as you are. That's why, although the frames of a film are always the same—the same number, in the same sequence, with the same sounds—every screening is different. The difference is sometimes subtle but it's there. It depends on the audience. There is a circle that goes from the audience to the film and back. Each person is looking and thinking and feeling and coming up with his or her own sense of things. And it's probably different from what I fell in love with.

So you don't know how it's going to hit people. But if you thought about how it's going to hit people, or if it's going to hurt someone, or if it's going to do this or do that, then you would have to stop making films. You just do these things that you fall in love with, and you never know what's going to happen.

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IDEAS

An idea is a thought. It's a thought that holds more than you think it does when you receive it. But in that first moment there is a spark. In a comic strip, if someone gets an idea, a lightbulb goes on. It happens in an instant, just as in life.

It would be great if the entire film came all at once. But it comes, for me, in fragments. That first fragment is like the Rosetta Stone. It's the piece of the puzzle that indicates the rest. It's a hopeful puzzle piece.

In *Blue Velvet*, it was red lips, green lawns, and the song—Bobby Vinton's version of "Blue Velvet." The next thing was an ear lying in a field. And that was it.

You fall in love with the first idea, that little tiny piece. And once you've got it, the rest will come in time.

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DESIRE

Desire for an idea is like bait. When you're fishing, you have to have patience. You bait your hook, and then you wait. The desire is the bait that pulls those fish in—those ideas.

The beautiful thing is that when you catch one fish that you love, even if it's a little fish—a fragment of an idea—that fish will draw in other fish, and they'll hook onto it. Then you're on your way. Soon there are more and more and more fragments, and the whole thing emerges. But it starts with desire.

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CONSCIOUSNESS

Through meditation one realizes the unbounded.
That which is unbounded is happy.
There is no happiness in the small.

UPANISHADS

Little fish swim on the surface, but the big ones swim down below. If you can expand the container you're fishing in—your consciousness—you can catch bigger fish.

Here's how it works: Inside every human being is an ocean of pure, vibrant consciousness. When you "transcend" in Transcendental Meditation, you dive down into that ocean of pure consciousness. You splash into it. And it's bliss. You can vibrate with this bliss. Experiencing pure consciousness enlivens it, expands it. It starts to unfold and grow.

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If you have a golf-ball-sized consciousness, when you read a book, you'll have a golf-ball-sized understanding; when you look out a window, a golf-ball-sized awareness; when you wake up in the morning, a golf-ball-sized wakefulness; and as you go about your day, a golf-ball-sized inner happiness.

But if you can expand that consciousness, make it grow, then when you read that book, you'll have more understanding; when you look out, more awareness; when you wake up, more wakefulness; and as you go about your day, more inner happiness.

You can catch ideas at a deeper level. And creativity really flows. It makes life more like a fantastic game.

TRANSLATING THE IDEA

To me, every film, every project, is an experiment. How do you translate this idea? How do you translate it so that it goes from an idea to a film or to a chair? You've got this idea, and you can see it and hear it and feel it and know it. Now, let's say you start cutting a piece of wood and it's just not exactly right. That makes you think more, so you can take off from that. You're now acting and reacting. So it's kind of an experiment to get it all to feel correct.

When you meditate, that flow increases. Action and reaction go faster. You'll get an idea here, then you'll go there, and then there. It's like an improvisational dance. You'll just be zipping along; you'll be banging on all eight cylinders.

And it's not a pretend thing; it's not a feel-good program, where they tell you, "Stop and smell the roses, and your life will get better." It comes from within. It has to start from deep within, and grow and grow and grow. Then things really change.

So transcend, experience the Self—pure consciousness—and watch what happens.

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LOS ANGELES

I came to Los Angeles from Philadelphia, where I had lived for five years, attending art school. Philadelphia is known as the City of Brotherly Love, but when I was there, it was a hellhole. There wasn't a lot of love in that city.

I arrived in L.A. at night, so it wasn't until the next morning, when I stepped out of a small apartment on San Vicente Boulevard, that I saw this light. And it thrilled my soul. I feel lucky to live with that light.

I love Los Angeles. I know a lot of people go there and they see just a huge sprawl of sameness. But when you're there for a while, you realize that each section has its own mood. The golden age of cinema is still alive there, in the smell of jasmine at night and the beautiful weather. And the light is inspiring and energizing. Even with smog, there's something about that light that's not harsh, but bright and smooth. It fills me

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with the feeling that all possibilities are available. I don't know why. It's different from the light in other places. The light in Philadelphia, even in the summer, is not nearly as bright. It was the light that brought everybody to L.A. to make films in the early days. It's still a beautiful place.

ERASERHEAD

Eraserhead is my most spiritual movie. No one understands when I say that, but it is.

Eraserhead was growing in a certain way, and I didn't know what it meant. I was looking for a key to unlock what these sequences were saying. Of course, I understood some of it; but I didn't know the thing that just pulled it all together. And it was a struggle. So I got out my Bible and I started reading. And one day, I read a sentence. And I closed the Bible, because that was it; that was it. And then I saw the thing as a whole. And it fulfilled this vision for me, 100 percent.

I don't think I'll ever say what that sentence was.

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THE PACE OF LIFE

Fifty years ago, people were saying, "Everything's speeding up." Twenty years ago, they were still saying, "Everything's speeding up." It always seems that way. And it seems even more so now. It's crazy. When you watch a lot of TV and read a lot of magazines, it can seem like the whole world is passing you by.

When I was making *Eraserhead,* which took five years to complete, I thought I was dead. I thought the world would be so different before it was over. I told myself, *Here I am, locked in this thing. I can't finish it. The world is leaving me behind.* I had stopped listening to music, and I never watched TV anyway. I didn't want to hear stories about what was going on, because hearing these things felt like dying.

At one time, I actually thought of building a small figure of the character Henry, maybe eight inches tall, and constructing a small set out of cardboard, and just stop-motioning him through and finishing it. That was the only way I could figure doing it, because I didn't have any money.

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